

Key lawmakers give long-sought backing to Everglades projects

(July 31, 2007)

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Three long-sought environmental cleanups that are critical parts of a broader plan to restore the Everglades have won approval from key lawmakers in Congress - leaving only the formality of a final OK by the full Senate and House, which is expected later this week.

The Everglades projects, contained in a water resources bill that's taken Congress five years to pass, include cleanups of the Indian River Lagoon running through five southeast Florida counties and the Picayune Strand in Collier County near Florida's southwest coast, and also restoration of a 1,600-acre reservoir in Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade counties. All are considered essential to long-term plans for restoring the Everglades.

Both the Senate and House versions of the water bill, known as WRDA, contained the three projects before the separate bills went to a conference committee charged with ironing out any differences between the two. That committee finished its work late last week, but the text the bill wasn't published until today. (The text is available online at http://www.rules.house.gov/110/text/110_hr1495cr.pdf .)

"Finally," said U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL), the Senate sponsor of the Florida water projects. "We've been pushing for this a long time."

U.S. Rep. Tim Mahoney (FL-16), who sponsored the Everglades projects in the House version of WRDA , said, "The Indian River Lagoon, Picayune Strand, and Site 1 Impoundment projects are an important part of state-wide efforts to restore the Everglades. This is a critical step forward in making Congress keep its commitment to the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, which is important to the Indian River Estuary and our Treasure Coast economy. I have worked closely with the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and my colleagues from Florida to have these projects included in WRDA and will continue fighting to get this bill passed and signed by the President."

Another House sponsor of the projects, Rep. Alcee L. Hastings (FL-23), said, "My colleagues from Florida and I have been pushing Congress for years to authorize these vital Everglades projects. This new Congress made passing WRDA a priority and I am pleased that the conference report includes billions of dollars crucial to my district and the entire state of Florida to help protect and restore the Everglades."

Added Rep. Ron Klein, whose congressional district skirts part of the Everglades, "After years of congressional inaction to tackle Florida's Everglades restoration, I am pleased to see Congress reaffirm its commitment to one our country's most unique and fragile ecosystems. Although the federal government still lags behind the state of Florida in dedicated funding, despite their 50-50 partnership, I vow to keep fighting to ensure that the federal government fulfills its promise to restore the 'River of Grass' to its original splendor."

Passage of the water bill has been stymied since 2002. Previously both chambers passed different versions of the bill, but they could never reach a compromise. This year, the House passed its own WRDA legislation in March and the Senate passed its version in May.

Everglades projects totaling about \$1.8 billion now in WRDA:

Indian River Lagoon South

The WRDA Conference Report authorizes \$1.365 billion for restoration of the Indian River Lagoon South, to be split evenly by federal and non-federal costs. The project provides for ecosystem restoration, water supply, flood damage reduction, and protection of water quality.

Picayune Strand

The WRDA Conference Report authorizes \$375,330,000 to be split evenly between federal and non-federal costs, for environmental restoration of Picayune Strand. The Picayune Strand ecosystem restoration plan would help increase freshwater flows to natural areas.

Site 1 Impoundment

The WRDA Conference Report authorizes \$80.84 million for the environmental restoration of Site 1 Impoundment, Florida to be split evenly between federal and non-federal costs. The project consists of an aboveground reservoir covering 1,660 acres, with a normal water storage depth of approximately 8 feet. An inflow pump station will move water into the preserve from the Hillsboro Canal. Additional project components include a seepage control; system and remote-controlled gated culverts. The project is located in Palm Beach, Broward, and Miami-Dade Counties.

-###-